

Wildflowers for Central Florida Home Gardens

Fact Sheet
Residential Horticulture - 028
UF/IFAS Extension Orange County

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Why Wildflowers?

One of the major threats to the world is loss of biodiversity. Wildflowers are Florida-Friendly and support the principles “Attract Wildlife” and “Manage Pests Responsibly”. They provide food in the form of pollen and nectar that attract pollinators and beneficial insects that help control pests, creating an ecological landscape. Plant some wildflowers and experience the joy of watching nature come alive in your own backyard with all the bees and butterflies you will attract. Wildflowers are easy to grow from seed and are low impact, they can be grown with minimal use of water, fertilizer and pesticides. They are open pollinated so seed can be saved and replanted year after year.

Target Planting Dates

Fall is the ideal time to plant many wildflowers in Florida and October 1 thru December 31 are the best dates for planting. The weather is ideal to start seeds in October and the seedlings can grow and get hardened off before possibility of frost. While most Florida native plants can withstand a cold snap, some flowers such as cosmos and zinnias can be cold sensitive. Spring is another good time to plant wildflowers, especially annual species that flower quickly. The slower to bloom species tend to last longer, all the way through the summer into the fall.



Planting Instructions

Choose a site with a minimum of 6 hours of sun. Prepare your soil for seeding wildflowers by removing all existing growth and debris. Scatter your wildflower seeds evenly in your planting area. Pat them in using your hand or an implement. Never bury or cover your wildflower seeds with soil. Water your wildflower planting area so the soil is moist, not soaking wet, until the seeds are about 4-6" tall. After that the seedlings will survive on natural rains. Please do not spray with pesticides because they can kill the pollinators and beneficial insects.

Weed or Seedling?

One of the challenges of growing from seed is the weeding. We recommend learning the common weeds in your area and pulling the weeds you know. If you are not sure, let the plant grow and send a photo to your county extension agent. Common weeds include spurge, chamber bitters, sedges, purslane, nettle, and artillery weed. In the early growth stages, take time to do some weeding every week. After the wildflowers get at least 6" tall they should be able to outcompete the weeds.

Recommended Species for Central Florida

We recommend a mix of Florida native and nonnative flowers to provide floral resources for pollinators year-round. Plant a variety and make note of what species do best in your yard. Dedicate a small area in your yard where you can allow the flowers to grow their full life cycle and allow the wildflowers to reseed naturally year after year.

Lanceleaved Coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*)

Florida native lanceleaved coreopsis or tickseed is the most common species coreopsis and is very easy to grow. It is drought tolerant and lives about one year. Once it starts flowering, it doesn't stop. The beautiful golden flowers are nice as a cut flower and are a popular plant for pollinators.



Blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*)

Blanketflower is easy to grow from seed and thrives in dry sunny conditions. It is salt-tolerant and is used in coastal landscapes, but it will not tolerate shade or too much soil moisture. This is a great plant for difficult conditions such as sand dunes, roadways and parking lots. Blanketflower is a prolific self-seeder and may spread more than you want it to. Keep it in check by deadheading of spent flower heads.



Phlox (*Phlox drummondii*)

Drummond's phlox is a showy annual with bright purple, pink, or white flowers in small clusters. Phlox flowers in the winter, starting in December and continuing through March. It one of the commonly used species in roadside wildflower plantings. The seeds are a little tricky to collect as they pop off the plant once they are mature.



Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)

Florida native black-eyed Susan is a showy plant with fabulous yellow blooms. Like blanketflower, this wildflower can thrive in tough spots in the landscape. It is salt and drought tolerant and good for dry, sandy and coastal landscapes. This plant is in the Asteraceae family and has a compound flowerhead providing ray and disk florets that provide food for bees and butterflies. Birds like to eat the seed heads too.



Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

Calendula is also known as pot marigold. It is a cold hardy annual with single or double flowers in orange or yellow. The petals can be used as a dye too. The foliage is dense and low to the ground. The seeds are large and easy to collect once the seed heads are brown, dry and mature. To encourage more flowers, pinch off spent blooms.



Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*)

Cosmos is a sun loving annual that can grow up to 6' tall with a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. They are native to the southwestern United States and Mexico and do well in sandy low-fertility soils. The plants have weak stems that may need support of other plants or stakes. They have large, easy to save seeds.



Zinnia (*Zinnia spp.*)

There are many species of zinnia and they all work well in Florida gardens. They are annuals with beautiful colors that come in vivid colors like pink, purple, red, white, yellow, green, and even dotted. The flowers attract a large variety of pollinators that like to land on the “landing pad” in the center of the flower. Zinnias are heat tolerant but cannot tolerate temperatures below freezing.



Learn More: For more info contact Tia Silvasy, Extension Agent II, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ tsilvasy@ufl.edu 407-254-9200. Check out horticulture classes offered by UF/IFAS Extension Orange County at www.ocextension.eventbrite.com and read about Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ at <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>.